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Labour Responsibilities in Wartime

by

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LABOUR RESPONSIBILITIES IN WARTIME

by Elliott M. Little

This is the first opportunity I have had to speak to The Trades and Labor Congress but I do not consider myself a stranger among you. In the ordinary course of business over the years I have known and dealt with those of your leaders who are concerned with the problems of the pulp and paper industry. Since coming to Ottawa, I have met many more of your leaders and have discussed with them those national problems which must concern all of us in these critical days.

When I accepted the invitation to address your convention, I told your officers that I wanted to talk straight to you. I will not pull any punches. The things we have to talk about and the world situation in the light of which we must discuss them, are far too serious for anything but plain talk. Some of the things I am going to say may not please you, but I believe that I can talk to you as no stranger. I am sure that we can discuss these things with understanding and without ill-will, and I speak with all the sincerity that is in me.

I shall try to do two things today. First, as Director of National Selective Service, I shall tell you briefly, as I would any group of Canadian citizens, about the problems and the plans of National Selective Service. Secondly, both as Director of National Selective Service and as a friendly and constructive critic of the labor movement, I will discuss some aspects of the trade union movement in relation to selective service.

I will say things today that I would not have said a year ago. I will say things today that I would not have believed a year ago. Selective Service will do things next

week and will expect your support in doing things that neither of us would have tolerated a year ago.

Cast your mind, just a moment, on what has happened in the year since you last met in Calgary. It is in the dark shadow of these events that you **MUST** conduct your deliberations this week. I shall not recite them all, but the mention of Hong Kong, Singapore, Pearl Harbor, Burma, Malaya, Java, the Aleutians, and the Caucasus, must force on the hearts and minds of all of us the realization of the circumstances in which we meet. We stand—uncertainly—at one of the great cross-roads of history.

Total War or Defeat

You, as trade unionists, I as an employer, all of us as Canadians—and members of the dwindling brotherhood of free men throughout the world can have only one concern today. That concern is whether, as individuals and as members of the organizations to which we belong, we can do something more today, tomorrow, next week, and next month to avert total defeat. I am not a pessimist. I am not a scare-monger; I am still optimistic enough to believe in eventual victory for the United Nations. But I say, with the utmost seriousness, that you should meet and deliberate during these days with the realization that this might be your last convention. If we are once defeated, you will never convene again.

That is the reason why Canada has chosen Selective Service; that is why I want to explain it to you. That is why we count on your active and unwavering support even though our actions may cut temporarily across some of your principles and policies.

Here is the manpower situation which Selective Service must tackle and is tackling immediately. The registration of unemployed males started in the first week of June, indicated that, to all intents and purposes, there is no unemployment in Canada. Some 98,000 registered as unemployed or not

gainfully employed in that registration. Of that 98,000 only about 60,000 are presently considered fully employable. Since the June registration many of the 60,000 have become employed.

This information comes to us at a time when the indicated combined needs of war industry and the armed forces for the last five months of this year are something over 250,000 people. Over 250,000 needed, with practically no one in Canada unemployed. The time has come, therefore, when we must know not only whether or not people are gainfully employed, but now usefully our man and womanpower are employed in the light of the needs of our war effort.

When I say usefully employed I mean just that. Few people in Canada would say that the total efforts of our man and womanpower are directed where they can best contribute to our war effort. The prime function of National Selective Service is to see that the efforts of every man and woman in Canada are so directed.

There are three principal remaining sources of man and womanpower: first, the more extensive use of women in essential services and production; second, the curtailment of less essential industries and occupations so that workers may be released for more essential work; and third, the improvement in the efficient use of those already employed in essential industries.

Women in Industry

We have already adopted plans for bringing more women into essential occupations. A registration of unemployed women in the 20 to 24 age group will be started September 14. The information supplied by this registration will permit us to plan to bring women into industry at an increasingly rapid rate. The introduction of women into industry on any major scale necessitates planning. It

will necessitate the provision and possible supervision of working conditions, rest rooms, rest periods, transportation, housing, recreation and so on. For an all-out effort, it will be necessary to have women doing many of the jobs normally done by men. The most realistic attitude on the part of trade unions in particular and labor in general will be necessary to facilitate the introduction of women to industry on such a scale.

Curtailment of many of our less essential industries and occupations must and will take place. We shall have to get along with less and less of the things we have been accustomed to having. We must eliminate all non-essential work or work which can be avoided by proper planning. We must avoid over-concentration of work if it means extra construction of housing for workers in a given area, wherever it is possible take the work to people in less congested areas.

Not one man-hour of effort or one pound of material should be used in such secondary problems if avoidable by planning. A beginning has been made in this direction and in future new plants or new work, wherever possible, will be placed in areas where workers can be housed without additional construction. Factory space and living accommodation should, and probably will be appropriated to accomplish this end.

A third source of manpower can be uncovered by improving the efficiency in the use of men in essential work and by seeing that all part-time employment is eliminated and everyone employed a full work-week.

There are other sources of manpower—reduction in turnover of labor and reduction of unnecessary absenteeism. If we fail to correct labor turnover and absenteeism then it means a more severe curtailment or shutdown of less essential industry with all the dislocation and inconvenience which that involves. Both labor turnover and absenteeism must be brought to an irreducible minimum—now.

New Control Orders

Within a few days we will issue orders which will impose additional controls over the movement of labor, with the intent of minimizing the present excessive and wasteful mobility.

In June we issued a Control of Employment Order stating that no person could get a job and no employer could engage any person without the approval of a selective service officer. This order was issued to give the selective service officer an opportunity to direct the worker, by invitation, to the most essential work and to keep employers in less-essential industries from getting additional help, until the more essential demands were met. To ease the immediate administrative load on the employment service we permitted the employer, until further notice, to engage help without prior approval of the selective service officer, but to notify the selective service officer within three days of such engagement. We are withdrawing that three-day privilege because more direct controls are now necessary.

We shall issue another order taking over the control of advertising for help, whether such advertising be through the newspapers, magazines, radio or other media. With "help wanted" advertising uncontrolled, we have the ridiculous situation where one war industry is stealing men from another war industry. We have the case of men expert in one line of essential war work quitting and engaging themselves as experts in another line of work in other industries, at the expense of both the work they left and the work to which they are going.

With some common-sense exceptions, we shall, within a few days, issue an order that an employer cannot discharge an employee and an employee may not quit his or her position without seven days' notice. This provides a "cooling off" period, to give the selective service officer an

opportunity to investigate and attempt conciliation. It also gives National Selective Service some opportunity to re-allocate in essential work workers so dislocated.

An order will also be issued making it compulsory for an employable unemployed male person to accept work of high essentiality. We have had some difficulty in getting some fit unemployed males to accept any work. Voluntary unemployment in the present crisis is a luxury the country cannot afford.

Complete Planning Needed

Every one of these controls is necessary in planning for the full use of our man and womanpower. Rather than fewer we must expect more and more restrictive measures—not only with respect to our man and womanpower, but in many other phases of our day-to-day life. There will be increasing disruption, dislocation and inconvenience for both the individuals and for business. The road will get rougher as we proceed. Only by adequate planning can we keep the hardships to a minimum. Insofar as we possibly can, the employee or his representatives will be asked for help and advice in planning the details of the necessary dislocation.

We are setting up, where necessary, manpower advisory committees by industries, appointed by the director of National Selective Service. These will advise and make recommendations to the Director of National Selective Service on manpower problems affecting their particular industry. The first such committee was set up in the pulp and paper industry this month. The newsprint paper industry is working on an average at about 60 percent of capacity. Many of the employees in the industry are working only part-time. Aside from the fact that they cannot maintain their war savings and other commitments, this is a waste of manpower. That committee has been asked to determine how many men working full time are required

to produce the pulp and paper necessary to meet the demand, and how many men can be released for essential war work and to recommend the principle and conditions of transfer. This committee is composed of five members of management and five members representing employees. We propose to set up similar committees, composed of half management and half employee representation, in such industries where, through part time employment, a pool of manpower exists, or where, because of necessity, due whether to material or manpower shortage, an industry is to be curtailed.

Selective Service needs the help and advice which both management and employees in each industry so affected can give to Selective Service. We believe the employee should be represented because in the manpower dislocation he, not only his industry, will be inconvenienced. I may say we have met with opposition in certain quarters as to the composition of these committees, but I am convinced that the principle on which the committees are organized is sound, and we plan to proceed with them until convinced that they cannot perform a useful function.

Mutual Understanding is Essential

You know that Selective Service is working actively to promote better understanding between management and employee and improve industrial relations generally, to accelerate the war effort, to improve the efficiency in the use of manpower, by the formation of employer-employee committees. A maximum war effort will come only with a maximum degree of understanding and confidence between management and men. We hope these committees will help bring that understanding about.

Right here I'd like to say that labor, on its side, should demonstrate a greater appreciation of the difficulties which face management these days. This has been a period of terrific expansion in Canadian industry, creating an endless

succession of problems for management. There are questions of supplies of material, priorities, quantity and quality of manpower, and so forth. It has been no bed of roses for the employers and if they have seemed indifferent to the problems of their employees, it has not always been because of hostility or callousness.

Huge new plants have been put up overnight across this country, often to make things never before manufactured in Canada. They've been manned largely with green help. Even many of the more skilled workers have been freshly or only partly trained. There has been an equal shortage of experienced management personnel and supervisory staff.

Those are factors which both labor and management should keep in mind. A good deal more tolerance and understanding of the other fellow's viewpoint and problems must be shown by both labor and management.

Canada has reached the stage where we must get our manpower effort in balance. We cannot go on forever increasing the size of our army, increasing our war production, increasing our agricultural production, continuing civilian production at present levels. We can go further in our manpower effort, I say, without fear of contradiction, but it can only be done by the closest sort of co-ordination and intelligence in planning. So far as National Selective Service is concerned, the announcement of the Prime Minister that total manpower control is being placed under the Minister of Labor, with administration by Selective Service, has clarified although it has not minimized our task. We are now in a better position to achieve the balance between the different agencies requiring manpower, so that a more efficient use is possible. The job of National Selective Service is to have every man and woman at the work which will most usefully contribute to the war effort. The name Selective Service should be taken literally.

Selective Service and Unions

It is an essential instrument of total war. It will annoy and irritate and inconvenience most of us. It will upset, it must upset, our peacetime habits. That is why I feel I must discuss some aspects of trade unionism in its relation to Selective Service.

My first point in this connection is simple and obvious. This policy cannot succeed without the active support of Canada's workers. The policy was developed only after the fullest and freest consultation with your duly designated representatives and other representative groups. It's not my policy, it's our policy—yours and mine.

We shall make mistakes in administration. There will be moments of confusion at certain points. There will be bitter criticism, sometimes with good reason, sometimes without either reason or knowledge. But it must have the unstinting support of every citizen if we are to put forth a total effort. If in cold blood, with full knowledge of the war situation, you find you cannot give Selective Service your unqualified support, don't whisper about it. Come out in the open and blast hell out of it.

Selective Service is concerned with everything that affects the numbers and the efficiency of Canadian workers. Our greatest manpower reserve lies in improving the efficiency of labor and economizing in its use. One of the best ways to improve the efficiency of labor is to improve relations between management and labor. This brings me directly to the subject of trade unions. As Director of National Selective Service I have to be neutral about trade unionism. I am urging Canadian employers to improve their relations with their employees, to set up joint committees, to share more of their heavy responsibility with their workers. As Director of National Selective Service I cannot and will not let our Policy or our organization be exploited as a screen for the promotion of trade unions,

which naturally wish to extend their membership, nor will we allow it to be used by employers as an instrument with which to fight organized labor.

Employers and Unions

You know as well as I that in Canada there is in some quarters a hostile attitude towards labor unions. Some of it stems from those employers whose views date back to the eighteenth century, who still think of their men as chattels, who think because they own their own businesses they are entitled to run them without reference to the welfare of the public or of their own employees. But much of the hostility to trade unionism is based on the fear which many perfectly reasonable employers have of certain trade union policies and practices. The fear may not be well founded. It might disappear with experience. But it is here at the moment and I sometimes think that, far from trying to remove it, some trade union groups almost go out of their way to increase it.

In one way or another you ask an employer who has never dealt collectively with his employees, who may in fact never have been asked before to deal collectively with them, to sign up with the union. What does he think of first? He probably doesn't think first of the inadequately publicized cases of union-management cooperation of which there are many constructive examples. If he is an ordinary human being, the first things that occur to him are those things unions said and broadcast about him during the organizing campaign. Harrassed by all the wartime worries of management, innocently thinking that he is a pretty decent citizen getting on with his job in the war effort, the employer sometimes finds himself faced by an organizing campaign in which he is vilified and maligned as an oppressor of widows and the fatherless. Although his relations with his employees over the years may have been good or even excellent, he may find that some union organizers, in

their propagandist zeal, have quite unfairly undermined employee confidence in his management.

Confidence in management is important. One reason for organizing trade unions is to achieve a greater feeling of security. A sense of security also comes if the worker feels he is part of a successful organization and particularly does he have that feeling if he has confidence in management. Therefore nothing should be done by the worker or the trade unions unjustly to undermine management; conversely management must deserve confidence.

When confidence in management is undermined, work suffers and the war effort slackens. It is no mark of labor statesmanship in this national emergency to try to recruit new members by attacks on management which undermine the war effort. The trade union movement has done that often. That is why many employers are genuinely fearful of unions.

Inter-Union Rivalry

When asked to sign up with a union, the next thing an employer thinks about is probably the cleavage in, and the bitter rivalries between the different branches of the labor movement. He knows that many union policies and practices today are determined by, in fact I might say distorted by inter-union rivalry. He has night mares about quite unreasonable jurisdictional strikes over issues that don't concern him in the least. He knows that, in the competition for members, rival trade union leaders are tempted to make impossible promises, and the failure to keep them leads to unrest and loss of production.

He then thinks probably of some of the high lights of our recent industrial history. He doesn't think of the hundreds of cases where employers and unions get along quietly and helpfully together. He knows that the trade union movement as a whole supports the war effort but he also knows that some unions still encourage or condone restric-

tion of output. He thinks of the longshoremen on the east coast who, in the face of a desperate shipping situation, have refused to work at night. He thinks of the machinists of the Halifax dockyards who refuse to repair vitally needed ships on Sunday in protest against the recognition of a rival union in another shipyard. He remembers that the machinists and blacksmiths, two unions out of eleven, refused to accept the inconvenience of seven day operation in the B.C. shipyards. He remembers the slow down in the Cape Breton mines, which was caused in part by political rivalry within the union itself. What possible excuse can justify strikes or any other interference with production in wartime?

I could cite dozens of other examples, not necessarily in condemnation of trade unions, but in explanation of the fear of many employers of trade unions and their fear of the effect of trade unionism on war production. Many employers may not fully realize that there is nothing better than a trade union properly led, but they think there are few things worse than a trade union poorly led.

The Responsibility to Lead

The times cry for leadership. I am frank to say that I believe that there have been many occasions when the unions have not given their members the leadership to which they were entitled. I know of cases where leaders have taken a short run attitude and have disregarded the far-sighted considerations that should have determined their decisions.

Selective Service is another challenge to your leadership.

Will you give the rank and file of Canada's working men and women that day-to-day leadership that will produce the submerging of individual self-interest and organizational self-interest for the general good and the safety of

us all, that will produce full cooperation between management and labor, that will allay any unreasonable fears that employers may have of trade unions?

Will you stimulate your members to their greatest personal effort, to the least possible absence from work, to the minimum movement from job to job?

Will you encourage your members in the willing acceptance of and compliance with government policy?

One of our common goals is industrial democracy. To reach it we must have an industrious democracy.

Canada's working men and women and Canada's management and employers are doing a splendid job of war production. All of us may well be proud of it. But it is not enough. We must work harder, sacrifice more, and endure more before the first glimmer of victory begins to tinge the darkness through which we march. If we cannot march shoulder to shoulder with understanding and forbearance and courage, we shall be marched in chains to the destiny of all those who under-estimate the enemy.

The times call for leadership. The country is demanding leadership from the government—from selective service. Insofar as we are capable, so help me, Selective Service will give you leadership.

I promise you the road will not be easy. I can tell you we are headed for temporary restrictions of more and more of the basic liberties of the people—restrictions in order that those very liberties may be preserved.

In peacetime unions emphasize their rights and liberties. In wartime their one concern must be their responsibilities. You want leadership. Will you help to provide it? Leadership implies discipline. It implies self-discipline. Can you take it?

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